Lostine Corridor Public Safety Project
SCENERY

Introduction

Scenery was identified as one of the outstanding remarkable values in the Lostine Corridor was designated as a Wild and Scenic River. Declining forest health is negatively affecting the scenic quality in the corridor.

This report has two primary purposes:

1. To disclose the effects of the proposed action on scenic resources.
2. To determine whether the proposed actions are consistent with Wallowa-Whitman National Forest Plan direction and the Lostine River Wild and Scenic River Management Plan.

Proposed Action

The primary purpose and need of this project is to address the public safety issues in the corridor. Secondly, the project will address risks to the other values in the corridor including infrastructure (homes, cabins, recreation improvements, roads), the natural resource values. To reduce risks to these values the Forest Service is proposing the following within the project area boundary (approx. 2,110 acres):

- Removing hazard trees along travel routes and adjacent to residential, recreation, historic and improvements (addressing immediate hazards to people and infrastructure).
- Thinning stand densities to decrease severity of wildfire and to improve forest resiliency (addressing both risks to ingress and egress in the corridor in the event of wildfire, and risk of insect and disease impacts over the long term).
- Removing fuels (surface fuels, ladder fuels, and small woody debris) throughout the corridor, particularly in the wildland urban interface.
- Creating small (less than 2 acre) gaps/openings in lodge pole stands to break up continuous fuels so fire could be managed more effectively.

The project will also assess opportunities to provide wood products for local markets, including firewood, through implementation.

Analysis Framework and Direction

Wallowa-Whitman National Forest Plan (1990)

Management direction is derived from the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan). In reviewing the Forest Plan the goal for the Landscape Management is to *"… meet visual quality objective through management techniques described in National Forest Landscape Management, Volumes 1 and 2"*. (Forest Plan, p. 4-42).

Lostine River Wild and Scenic River Management Plan (1993)

The Lostine River Wild and Scenic River Management Plan (River Plan) describes several relevant desired future conditions for landscape management (pg. 11):

- The Visual Quality Objective (VQO) of the 'recreation' section of the river is Retention.
- Adopt the 'Lostine River Viewshed Corridor Plan' by Walker and Macy, April 1992, as additional guidelines for managing visual resources within the river corridor.

Lostine River Viewshed Corridor Plan (1992)

The desired future condition relative to scenic values stated in the Lostine River Viewshed Corridor Plan are (pg. 10):

- A balance in the variety and amount of open and closed forest spaces
- Accentuation of views toward craggy mountain tops as well as meadows in the valley floor
- A variety of tree species, including deciduous, with uneven ages
- A predominance of open-type character and larch/pine species in campgrounds
- Campgrounds hidden from view from both road and river

Existing Condition

The Lostine River Viewshed Plan (1992) describes the desired scenic condition within the corridor to include a balance of open and closed forest spaces, views of distant peaks, open meadows, a variety of tree species with mixed ages, and a predominance of open-type character of larch and pine species.

The deterioration in forest health in the river corridor is resulting in a decline in the ability to meet the desired scenic quality. Previously green forest stands are experiencing increasing mortality and becoming denser with less diversity in species composition. This can reduce visitor's satisfaction with scenic quality as they view increasing pockets of dying (red and brown) trees and increased downed trees around recreation areas (hazard trees). High stand densities and increasing mortality may reduce the ability to retain features (live healthy forested stands, forest cover, views of wildlife, etc…) that contribute to high scenic quality over the long term.

The Lostine Corridor is a narrow, heavily forested river canyon. The one access road travels parallel, and often very near, to the Lostine River. Primary views for travelers are of the river, which is high volume and generally rapidly flowing, forested stands and intermittent views of mountain ridges. Over the past several decades the forested stands have looked dense and green in contrast to current condition of views of dead or dying trees, red needles, and more open stands due to declining forest health. Recreation and residential (mostly cabin-style) developments are also visible along the route.

Historic aerial photos of the Lostine Corridor from the 1930s showed greater diversity in stand structure with larger and more openings than the current condition.

There is a large amount of dead and down wood, creating a jack-strawed appearance, visible from foreground views. This condition, in combination with the increasing dense forest stands, while reducing views of rock features, mountain peaks, and the river. The existing scenic integrity is considered 'moderate' (VQO-partial retention).

There are areas with minimal diversity in color or texture. Stand structure and species diversity are lower and stand density is higher than the Historic Range of Variability (HRV). Given the current condition of the stands (levels of downed wood and litter fuels) the scenic stability is low. This means that the scenic attributes of the area have a low capacity for resilience in the event of fire and/or an insect/disease event. The capacity to fight fire in this area in a safe manner is diminished due to the single road access and steep terrain, this also contributes to low scenic stability.

Scenery Resource Methodology

Scenic Integrity: Scenic integrity is a measure of the intactness of the scenic character. This indicator takes into account any impacts that appear unnatural or uncharacteristic in form, line, color, texture, and scale. This indicator uses a descriptive or qualitative scale from preservation, which is entirely intact; to maximum modification which is heavily impacted and dominated by an unnatural or uncharacteristic feature on the landscape.

Scenic Stability: Scenic stability is a measure of resiliency which provides ecological sustainability information necessary to conserve valued scenery for future generations. The resiliency of scenery is primarily based on the HRV of those attributes which provides information about how scenery attributes are perpetuated within the ecosystem. The indicator utilizes a scale from very low to very high.

Short-term timeframe: A short-term time frame is determined to be one year after the project is implemented, which coincides with a one year growing cycle of grasses and forbs that can often restore the intactness of character of foreground impacts such as skid trails and ground disturbance activities. The scenic stability indicator does not consider a short-term timeframe.

Long-term timeframe: The long-term time frame is determined to be 10 years after the project is implemented, which is a timeframe for when effects begin to seem permanent in the minds of reoccurring viewers. A long-term timeframe is considered with the scenic stability indicator.

Environmental Consequences

Effects

The proposed actions are intended to move forest conditions back toward the desired state and reduce the risks of severe impacts to the forested stands, which make up much of the scenic character of Lostine Corridor.

It is recognized that there would be short term visible effects of the proposed action during implementation and immediately after, including working equipment, decks of logs and slash prior to being removed/burned, some denuded soils where equipment travels over ground that is not snow-covered, and cut tree stumps prior to low-cutting adjacent to recreation areas. The

Lostine Corridor is generally a highly productive growing site and new ground vegetation (shrubs, forbs and grasses) is expected to recover and grow quickly into areas where thinning occurs, thus reducing the visibility of management activities.

Mitigation measures proposed to help reduce these affects include low-cutting stumps in high visibility areas, designing thinning units so the remaining stand has variability (avoid even spacing), disposing of slash in a timely manner. There are no predicted long-term negative effects on scenic quality.

Scenic Integrity: The proposed action would not create uncharacteristically large openings, or any unnatural appearing features of line, color, texture or form, that would be visible from middle ground or background distances. There is a proposal to create nine small (about 2 acres) openings that are adjacent to natural openings are not expected to be noticeable by visitors beyond the initial short term. The timber stands being treated will not have an unnaturally uniform spacing or pattern. Stands would be opened providing some more distance views into the stands, which is preferred (Ribe 2002). Within treatment the units, the fresh cut stumps would be visible within the immediate foreground (300 feet). The views of these units would be fleeting (less than a five minute duration at typical driving speed) and probably not noticeable by the casual observer.

The effects related to the treatment activities will be temporal in nature and have only a short term effect. Visual impacts related to disturbance of soils and ground cover is expected to recover within the following growing season. Stumps that are along high use areas, will be low cut, and would not be discernible once grasses grow up around them. The Scenic Integrity is expected to remain at moderate overall.

Scenic Stability: Scenic stability is expected to improve where stands are being thinned (approximately 450 acres). Stand composition and density would be adjusted toward HRV. Stands are expected to be more resilient to insect events that could alter the scenery to such a degree that it is uncharacteristic and unsightly. Throughout the corridor, smaller trees will be thinned to remove ladder fuels, leaving stands more open. A condition that studies have shown viewers generally prefer (Ribe 2002). Fuels reduction would reduce the likelihood of fire

spreading through the forest canopy, making timbered stands more resilient. Scenic Stability is expected to improve to moderate over the whole project area.

Cumulative Effects

Scenic Integrity and Scenic Stability: There are no cumulative effects expected in relation to the proposed action. There are no known future activities planned that would overlap spatially or temporally with the proposed activities.

Consistencies

Based on the information documented in this report, the proposed actions under the Lostine Project are found to be consistent with Forest Plan as amended by the Lostine Wild and Scenic River Plan and consistent with the Lostine River Viewshed Corridor Plan.

Literature Cited

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Ribe 2002, Environment and Behavior. 34(6): 757-780,

Tahvanainen *et al*. 2001, Landscape and Urban Planning. 53: 53-70.).

USDA Forest Service 1974, National Forest Landscape Management Volume 2, Chapter 1 the Visual Management System; Agriculture Handbook 462.

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USDA-Forest Service. 2007. Appendix J – Recommended SMS Refinements, Appendix to Landscape Aesthetics, Handbook for Scenery Management, USDA Handbook 701,